

HONG KONG

REPORT & REFLECTIONS on NFP PROMOTIONAL TRIP In Hong Kong, 9-21 Jan 14

Fr. Matthew Habiger OSB

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Introduction

If you make yourself available to promote God's plan for Marriage, Spousal Love and Family, you never know where you might be called to go next. Recently I returned from Hong Kong where I spent 11 days (9-20 Jan) promoting Natural Family Planning to a wide variety of audiences. Why Hong Kong?

The Initiators: John and Yrene Lewis

Last September (2013) John Lewis emailed Fr. Dan McCaffrey and me, suggesting that we come to Hong Kong and help promote NFP. John is a private pilot, stationed now in HK, from where he flies businessmen by private jet all over Asia, and all over the world. We met in 2002 when he, his wife Yrene, and two sons (now there is four) lived in Wichita, Kansas. John and Yrene are NFP teachers, and are very active in whatever parish they are in. John is a convert. He and Yrene have studied their Faith in depth, and are committed to living it. They see the devastation that contraception and sterilization have brought to the marriages of their friends, and they understand how NFP accords so well with God's plan for marriage and family. Having lived two years in HK, they recognized the great blessings that a stronger program in NFP could bring to the Catholic parishes in HK, as well as elsewhere in Asia.

John and Yrene are the ideal "persons of contact on location" that NFP Outreach is looking for. They know the area they live in, and are known to the major players in the local Church. They are able to set up a busy speaking tour that maximizes Fr. Dan McCaffrey or my time while we are there. They know how to network, how to find the people who can best support the promotional effort, and where to find the talent (e.g. making attractive fliers). In HK, people everywhere are using their cell phones and smart phones. Likewise, during most every free moment, John and Yrene were reading or texting emails, or making live calls to their network of friends. Add four sons, 13 years of age and younger, to the mix and you get a picture of their "connectedness" with the local culture.

Background on Hong Kong

Hong Kong is located off the southern coast of mainland China and in many ways is a gateway to China. 7 million people live there. That is three times as many people as live in Kansas, my home state. The Heritage Foundation rates it as the world's freest economy. It is the financial capital of all Asia, and one of the great

cities of the world. Everything bustles there with economic activity. Every five minutes a 747 airbus, or an air cargo jumbo jet, takes off from the Hong Kong International airport. This airport has the largest air cargo traffic in the world. It is also built on reclaimed land.

I spent my first two days in the Lewis' apartment, on the 55th floor of Tower 5, south of the airport. From there I could observe the constant activity of the gigantic airplanes at the airport, and also one of the harbors where large container cargo ships and ocean liners were in abundance.

Hong Kong is the world's most vertical city, where office buildings and apartment towers go upwards to compensate for scarce space. The standard of living there is very high. Real estate is very high. Public transportation provides 90% of the local travel, and it is very efficient. The subway system, the double-decker buses, cabs and ferries are very clean. A \$5,000 fine is posted for littering (8 HK dollars = 1 US dollar). This city probably has the greatest number of elevators in the world, and most elevators are sanitized every four hours.

Everything here speaks of competence and resourceful planning. The opportunities which accompany economic freedom have drawn great talent into the city. Old buildings have been replaced with modern and attractive high structures. The architectural designs for the exterior and interior of major buildings are first class. The bridges, tunnels and roads are aesthetically pleasing and very functional. During rush hour, Central Station is a marvel to see as hundreds of thousands of people make their connections with the MTR (Mass Transit Railway). Photos of the city's skyline would impress anyone. Here is a great Chinese success story.

Hong Kong also has the lowest fertility rate in the world: 1.1 babies per woman. Many women put off having their one baby until they are in their 40s, and then discover they have many infertility problems. You don't see many pregnant woman or babies. You do see lots of dogs and pets. HK has a high rate of contraception usage: 75%. China has 84%.

The Chinese people are very lean and healthy. You hardly see one that is over weight. That is because people here walk abundantly, and eat moderately. Perhaps using chopsticks contributes to slower eating! 90% of all foods are imported; for example, the milk I used for breakfast cereal came from Switzerland.

The United Kingdom took over HK as a colony after the First Opium War in 1842, and transferred ownership of HK back to the Chinese government in 1997. The English infrastructure is very evident, and is a major contribution to the HK success story. Chinese officials would like to have full control over this economic powerhouse, but it is cautious with how it handles the "goose that lays golden eggs." The official policy is: "One government with two systems." HK residents defend their freedoms from outside intrusion with robust firmness. Economists think that Mainland China has adopted some of the traits of democratic capitalism

found to be so successful in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, HK and Singapore. That is why China today has the second largest economy, right under the USA. With growing economic freedoms, greater political freedoms usually follow. It is reasonable to think that if the Chinese leaders adapted HK's democratic capitalism for the mainland, China would now be the world's foremost superpower. Under Communist pretensions, it is fortunate that they are not the leading superpower.

But all of this economic prosperity in China would be of no avail if there were only weak marriages and forced small families. The one child policy, enforced with mandatory abortion for a second pregnancy, has recently been softened a trifle, but the demography of China still has serious problems. 50 million men will never have wives, because of Chinese leaders' social engineering. The distribution of age groups is problematic. 12.5% of China is over 60. By the year 2030 that percentage will double. There are already too few workers and young people. That will have serious economic consequences. If baby girls can be aborted at will by parents who want a son in preference to a daughter, then consider what that does for the advancement of women.

Mainland China has 50 thousand trained NFP teachers. The Chinese government invited Drs. John and Evelyn Billings to come to China many times to teach the Billings method. This was an attempt to soften the brutal one child policy enforced by mandatory abortion.

What China needs is to discover God's plan for Marriage, Spousal Love and Family. For too many years Communist China has tried to weaken the family and redirect all attention to the State. State propaganda, re-education centers, and a one-child policy have done great damage to marriage and family life in China. God's plan for marriage, spousal love and family is a magnificent plan. It applies to all cultures, and to every generation. Strong marriages lead to healthy families. Healthy families produce young productive citizens, who have been led into the various natural and civic virtues that a stable citizenship requires. Marriage and family predate any government. The State exists for marriage and the family, not the other way around.

Teaching God's plan for Marriage, Spousal Love and Family is the work of the Church, which was established by God to do this. NFP is part of the picture because couples must have an effective, and completely morally good, means of spacing their pregnancies. The good exercise of sexuality and a prudent use of fertility is a vital part of God's plan. NFP is part of the big picture. Contraception and sterilization frustrate God's plan, and have brought serious damage to anyone who uses them.

The Speaking Tour

The week was packed with events. I celebrated Mass and preached at one Sunday Mass at the Cathedral, and also one Mass on Friday at St. Joseph's Church (near the Cathedral) to 300 Filipinos, and at two other locations during the week. The second weekend I preached at three Masses at Epiphany parish centers in Tung Chung, and after each Mass, John and Yrene gave a personal testimony to the many values of NFP in their marriage.

The Hong Kong Catholic Marriage Advisory Council made arrangements for these presentations:

Monday evening 7-9 PM I spoke to 22 permanent Deacons at the Pastoral Center on the theme: How to Preach God's Plan for M, SL and F.

Tuesday evening 7-9 PM I spoke to 15 NFP teachers at the Grand Millennium Plaza on the themes: The Spirituality of NFP, and How to Encourage People to Discover NFP.

Friday evening 7-9:30 PM Dr. Lek-Lim Chan and I addressed 4 Catholic medical doctors, two social workers and other medical personnel at the HK Catholic Marriage Advisory Council on the theme: The Vital Role of NFP trained Doctors in Promoting Marriage and Family.

Sunday afternoon 2:30-4:30 there was a Conference at Epiphany Parish Catholic Secondary School in Tung Chung on the topic, God's Plan for Love & Life. 75 attendees came, many of whom were parish leaders. At this Conference, I spoke on the beauty of God's plan for marriage, family and spousal love, which NFP enriches and contraception injures and degrades. The Lewises gave an expanded personal testimony of the many values that NFP has brought to their marriage and their relationship. Then Dr. Lek-Lim Chan gave a PowerPoint presentation on how the various contraceptives harm a woman's reproductive system, followed by a case by case presentation of how charting can be used to diagnose hidden problems within a woman's fertility, and then find a natural cure for them.

Dr. Chan lives in Malaysia, is trained in the Billings Method, treats patients, trains teachers and promotes NFP at every opportunity in Southeast Asia, Australia, the UK, USA and elsewhere. When he heard about the Conference in HK, he immediately volunteered his services.

The diocesan paper, the *Sunday Examiner* carried advertisements on the Conference. A beautiful flier on the Conference was widely circulated.

Some Results and Hopes

Christians are 12% of the HK population, or 830,000, and the ratio between Protestants and Catholics is 4:3. I am told that there are 240,000 Filipinos there. Many Filipina women work as domestic helpers, and others perform as musicians. The Chinese Catholics that I met impressed me with the strength of their Faith. Perhaps they understand what religious persecution means.

What is the greatest contribution that the Catholics in Hong Kong can make to their country? The Catholic faith stresses the basics of humanity: a deep relationship with God, integral human fulfillment, strong marriages, healthy and happy families, education, health care, productivity, patriotism and culture. Catholics make a great contribution to whatever country and culture they live in. Perhaps the greatest contribution Catholics can make in HK is to foster all these qualities, especially strong marriages and healthy families, open to the gift of life. The Chinese people naturally respond to these values. Perhaps the Mainland leaders will come to appreciate these values and not consider Catholicism as a threat to their authority. Education and health care have always been strong Catholic assets, and the native people always request them.

In promoting religious freedom, the Catholic Church is really defending human dignity and human rights against an otherwise

unchallenged government. Governments are totally incompetent in granting, or withdrawing, human dignity and human rights, or defining marriage and the family. If a country is to flourish, then there must be a just political order, which provides all the necessary services that a society requires.

We can hope that this speaking tour made a contribution to building stronger marriages and healthy, happy families. The contraceptive culture is entrenched in HK and on the mainland. The birth dearth and the fear of the child is a major problem in China. We can hope that many couples will discern God's plan for their families. Many will be called to become trained teachers of NFP. Some Catholic doctors may become trained as NFP physicians. Perhaps this speaking tour will lead to others in Southeast Asia and in Southwest Asia. The perfect venue for this mission is working through diocesan structures and the parishes.

On a personal note, I celebrated my 72nd birthday on Sunday, Jan 19. This is one birthday I will not forget. After all Masses and the afternoon Conference, Fr. Henry SVD, the pastor of Epiphany Parish, took all the speakers to a Thai restaurant near the airport. Andrew Kong from Singapore, who had just given a two-day seminar on the Theology of the Body in Kennedy Town, HK, and several friends, joined us for a delightful evening. Truly, there are many enjoyable benefits that come with a speaking tour.

A shorter report by John Lewis:

HONG KONG -- "We can learn NFP – God's way and nature's way of spacing the pregnancies naturally. NFP is in accord with God's plan. It is 99% effective. It does not place powerful chemicals in a woman's body. It is a responsibility shared by both husband and wife. It is inexpensive. It builds strong marriages, and healthy happy families," preached NFP Outreach missionary Fr. Matthew Habiger, OSB, at "God's Plan for Love & Life" seminar and Masses at Epiphany parish in Tung Chung on Sunday, January 19, 2014. Other speakers included Dr. Lek-Lim Chan of Malaysia, an expert in the Billings Ovulation Method of NFP, and John and Yrene Lewis, a couple who formerly lived in Wichita, KS, and taught NFP for the Couple to Couple League International and who now live in Hong Kong.

"There is widespread contraception and sterilization. This is a serious abuse of God's plan for spousal love. Each marital act is to be open to 1) the goodness of love and, 2) the goodness of life. The two dimensions are inseparable," said Fr. Matthew.

This seminar concluded Fr. Matthew's 10-day preaching tour throughout Hong Kong, which included preaching NFP at Masses at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (chair of Cardinal John Tong and home of relics of Blessed John Paul II) as well at churches in Discovery Bay, Central, and Mui Wo. Other venues included talks given to doctors, permanent deacons, and NFP teachers, arranged by the Hong Kong Marriage Advisory Council.

"Every couple, and every young adult should learn NFP. They should learn God's plan for marriage, spousal love and family," said Fr. Matthew, who mentioned that Hong Kong has one of the lowest fertility rates in the world at only 1.1 children per woman (whereas 2.1 children per woman is the minimum required just for

a society's replacement).

"NFP is good medicine!" Fr. Matthew told doctors and nurses during a talk where he and Dr. Chan explained the good bioethics of NFP for couples in contrast to the very harmful bioethical consequences of contraception.

Quotes from Dr. Chan:

"Intra-uterine devices work as abortifacients by preventing implantation of embryos and the oral contraceptive pill works part of the time in the same way."

"Married couples who truly love each other know in their hearts that sexual relationship is meant to be a beautiful experience and not to be degraded with condoms, withdrawal or other artificial interference."

"In 2005, the International Agency for Research on Cancer of WHO has stated that combined oral contraceptive pill is highly carcinogenic to humans based on review of scientific publications."

"Modern natural family planning methods are based on science and have a reliability of over 99 % for avoiding pregnancy and up to 70 % for helping to achieve pregnancy in couples facing difficulty conceiving."

"Billings Ovulation Method in which I am specialized can be used monitoring follicular activity and ovulation and thus serves as a tool for diagnosis of disorders. And once a disorder is identified and treatment commenced, the Method can be used to monitor recovery."

Quote from Lewis:

"NFP is more than just a method, it's a way of life, a language of love!" said John and Yrene Lewis during their couple testimony, "We like to use the acronym LOVE to describe what we believe to be the best four benefits of NFP: 1) Listen; it has taught us to Listen better to each other, our bodies, and to God. 2) Other-centered; it has helped us to focus on the other instead of selfishly only on ourselves. 3) Very low divorce rate; in fact, NFP couples have the lowest divorce rate in the world of around 4% and why some call it their "marriage insurance." 4) Effective; NFP has been 100% effective for us at both postponing and achieving pregnancy over our 15 years of marriage and we have been blessed with four wonderful sons, each planned with NFP."

Other...

"Cardinal John Tong wants to promote NFP to help married couples," said Joseph Tang Cho Fai, a reporter who interviewed Fr. Habiger for The Examiner diocesan newspaper.